

## The origins of vaccination: no inoculation, no vaccination

Boylston<sup>1</sup> is to be congratulated in dispelling the long held myth that Edward Jenner was given the notion of naturally acquired cowpox protecting humans against smallpox by a dairymaid. John Baron was guilty of doing history a considerable disservice by including this fanciful tale in his biography. It is not widely known that the acceptance of vaccination was influenced by Bloomfield and other poets of the Romantic Movement. One presumes Baron sought to boost Jenner's stature by introducing a similar approach. Today, those familiar with origins of vaccination will hopefully admit that vaccination was a development from variolation (inoculation with smallpox) which preceded it, and was not a 'discovery' *per se*. In considering Jenner's essential contribution, Fewster's observations<sup>2</sup> provide a direct link between the two practices and his input should be regarded with greater significance.

I would like to comment on some aspects of Boylston's second paper.<sup>1</sup> He refers to Jenner experimenting on two children – William Paed and Mary Paed. The correct spelling of this surname is Pead. It is possible this was due to a typo in the production of the author's paper, or its transcription for publication in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*. I have a long personal experience of the misspelling of the name! Correction should also be applied to Boylston's sequence of Jenner's vaccinations. Reference to *The Inquiry*<sup>3</sup> will confirm that cowpox inoculum was obtained from the arm of William Pead (Case 20) and used to vaccinate Hannah Excell (Case 21) with others. Mary Pead (Case 22) was one of three children vaccinated with cowpox passaged from Excell. It was William Pead and J Barge who were then inoculated with smallpox by Henry Jenner.

Brief mention is made of 'a farmer named Jesty'. This was Benjamin Jesty<sup>4</sup> of Yetminster in Dorset who devised and performed cowpox vaccinations against smallpox at Chetnole, near Yetminster in 1774. Two of his subjects were later challenged with

smallpox by variolation and were unaffected. There has been growing acceptance of Jesty's priority in the use of cowpox in recent years. His portrait,<sup>5</sup> mentioned on page 396, was located in South Africa after being 'lost' for 120 years. It was acquired by The Wellcome Trust, returned to this country in June 2006, restored, and since exhibited at Dorchester and the Wellcome Library in London.

While it is true that Jenner 'never refuted Fewster', more significantly, he did not pay tribute to his friend in writing. Given this monumental omission, we can imagine he would have thought it unthinkable to mention a lowly farmer as his inspiration to finally proceed. No giant's shoulders for him apparently. Jenner may not have claimed to discover the value of cowpox, nor to have been the first practitioner of the technique, but many historians seem to have difficulty in accepting these important truths.

### Declarations

**Competing interests:** None declared

### References

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